

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 20053

TEL AVIV FOR AMBASSADOR

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, UR, US
SUBJECT: ADDITIONAL ARTICLES ON VECHERNYAYA MOSKVA PAINT SOVIET
JEWS IN FAVORABLE LIGHT

REF: MOSCOW 18999

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. VECHERNYAYA MOSKVA CONTINUES ITS
SERIES OF INTERVIEWS WITH PROMINENT SOVIET JEWS. INTER-
VIEWS WITH SOVIET UNION'S LEADING YIDDISH EDITOR AND
MOSCOW'S RABBI ENABLE THE PAPER TO PLAY UP THE EXCELLENT
CONDITIONS IN WHICH SOVIET JEWRY LIVES AND ITS LOYALTY
TO PARTY AND FATHERLAND AND ALLOWS PAPER TO MAKE ATTACKS
ON SEVERAL FAVORITE PROPAGANDA TARGETS, INCLUDING THE U.S.
THE VENUE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN CHOSEN BECAUSE OF THE PAPER'S
COMPARATIVELY LARGE WESTERN READERSHIP. END SUMMARY.

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2. VECHERNYAYA MOSKVA FOR DECEMBER 7 CARRIES AN INTERVIEW
WITH AARON VERGELIS, EDITOR OF THE YIDDISH LANGUAGE
MONTHLY "SOVIETISH HEIMLANT". VERGELIS IS ONE OF THE
CHIEF OFFICIAL APOLOGISTS FOR SOVIET POLICY ON JEWS.
THE PRETEXT IS THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MAGAZINE.
THE VECHERKA ARTICLE CONSISTS PRIMARILY OF

EVIDENCE PURPORTING TO SHOW THE INTEGRATION OF YIDDISH LITERATURE INTO MULTINATIONAL SOVIET LITERATURE. VERGELIS NOTES THE VIGOR OF CONTEMPORARY SOVIET YIDDISH LITERATURE, AND SAYS THAT HIS MAGAZINE--READ IN MORE THAN 30 COUNTRIES--HAS SERVED AS A NURSERY FOR YOUNG YIDDISH WRITERS. HE LISTS THE NAMES OF A SERIES OF APPARENTLY PROMINENT LIVING YIDDISH WRITERS. THESE PEOPLE--MANY OF THEM MEMBERS OF THE UNION OF WRITERS, HE NOTES--COME FROM MOSCOW, ODESSA, KIEV, BIROBIDZHAN, KISHINEV AND CHERNOVTSI. WRITING IN THEIR "NATIVE LANGUAGE" AND PRODUCING PROSE, POETRY, DRAMA AND OTHER WORKS, SUCH WRITERS MAKE A GREAT CONTRIBUTION TO SOVIET LITERATURE.

3. VERGELIS GOES ON TO CRITICIZE THOSE WESTERNERS WHO COMPLAIN ABOUT THE LACK OF YIDDISH CULTURE IN THE USSR. HE SAYS THAT SUCH PEOPLE, MANY OF WHOM HE HAS SEEN, OFTEN SPEAK NEITHER YIDDISH NOR HEBREW. THEIR JOURNALS ARE PUBLISHED IN THE LOCAL VERNACULAR AND IN SMALL PRESS RUNS. VERGELIS THEN EQUATES ZIONISM WITH ANTI-SOVIETISM AND CRITICIZES A CONFERENCE ON YIDDISH CULTURE HELD RECENTLY IN JERUSALEM AS AIMING AT THE WRONG TARGET. CONTEMPORARY YIDDISH CULTURE IN THE SOVIET UNION CONSISTS OF MORE THAN SHOLOM ALEIKHEM. VERGELIS CONCLUDES IN RINGING TONES THAT MODERN SOVIET YIDDISH WRITERS SERVE THEIR SOCIALIST MOTHERLAND, PARTY AND PEOPLE.

4. VECHERKA FOR DECEMBER 11 CARRIES A LONG INTERVIEW WITH MOSCOW RABBI FISHMAN, BACK FROM A TRIP TO THE U.S. AS A MEMBER OF A RELIGIOUS EXCHANGE DELEGATION. FISHMAN COMMENTS THAT THERE WAS BOTH A GOOD DEAL OF INTEREST IN AND CONFIDENTIAL

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MUCH IGNORANCE OF THE USSR DISPLAYED BY THOSE AMERICAN JEWS WITH WHOM HE SPOKE. HE NOTES THAT HE INVITED PEOPLE TO COME AND SEE FOR THEMSELVES THE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH SOVIET JEWS LIVE. HE SAYS THAT HE WAS SURPRISED TO BE ASKED WHETHER HE HAD BEEN TRAINED AS A RABBI; EVEN WHETHER HE WAS A BELIEVING JEW. FISHMAN WENT ON TO DISCUSS HIS CHILDHOOD POVERTY AND THE DIFFICULTY JEWS HAD TO RECEIVE AN EDUCATION IN PRE-WAR POLAND.

5. FISHMAN GOES ON TO COMPLAIN ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE JDL. HE NOTES PERSONAL RUDENESS TO HIM, SAYS THAT THEY WOULD BE BETTER ADVISED DEFENDING AMERICANS FROM UNEMPLOYMENT, AND FIGHTING ITS RACISTS AND ANTI-SEMITES. HE THEN NOTES APPROVINGLY A RESOLUTION TAKEN BY AMERICA'S JEWISH LEADERS AND PUBLICIZED BY A MAJOR GROUP (THE "UNION OF JEWS") CRITICIZING THE JDL ON BOTH RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL GROUNDS.

6. FISHMAN'S PERORATION LINKS ZIONISTS TO THOSE OPPOSED TO PEACE. THIS ALLOWS HIM TO DILATE ON THE TRAGIC EXPERIENCES OF SOVIET JEWS (AND HIS OWN FAMILY) DURING THE WAR. ZIONISM, HE CONCLUDES, HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH JEWS, AND HE QUOTES JEREMIAH 29, CHAPTERS 4-7, ABOUT THE HOMELAND OF JEWS BEING THE COUNTRY IN WHICH THEY ARE BORN. FOR SOVIET JEWS THERE IS ONLY ONE HOMELAND, THE SOVIET UNION.

7. COMMENT. AS NOTED REFTEL, WE HAD BEEN TOLD THAT A SERIES OF SUCH ARTICLES WAS PLANNED FOR VECHERKA, MOSCOW'S LOCAL EVENING NEWSPAPER. SEVERAL OF OUR JEWISH SOURCES HAVE DRAWN OUR ATTENTION TO THESE ARTICLES AND OBSERVED THAT THE CHOICE OF VECHERKA AS THEIR VENUE IS NOT FORTUITOUS. SINCE IT IS A MOSCOW (I.E., NOT A "NATIONAL") NEWSPAPER IT IS NOT MUCH READ OUTSIDE THE CAPITAL. EDITORS OF PROVINCIAL PAPERS ARE UNLIKELY TO SEE IT, AND WILL THEREFORE NOT WORRY THAT A NEW CAMPAIGN PRAISING SOVIET JEWRY HAS BEGUN, AND THAT THEY TOO SHOULD RUN SUCH ARTICLES. CONFIDENTIAL

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ON THE OTHER HAND, IT IS A NEWSPAPER THAT MOSCOW'S FOREIGN COMMUNITY--EMBASSIES AND CORRESPONDENTS--CAN BE EXPECTED TO READ. THESE ARTICLES, OUR SOURCES SAY, ARE INTENDED FOR THIS AUDIENCE, TO SHOW THAT THERE IS NO DISCRIMINATION AGAINST JEWS, THAT INDEED THEIR POSITION IN SOVIET LIFE IS EXCELLENT. IF THIS IS THE AIM OF THE SERIES, IT IS UNLIKELY TO HAVE HAD MUCH EFFECT, SINCE SO FAR AS WE CAN TELL, NO EMBASSY OR FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT SEEMS TO HAVE NOTICED THE SERIES.

8. WE GATHER THAT THERE WILL BE TWO OR THREE MORE ARTICLES IN THE SERIES, ALSO ON CULTURAL THEMES, ALTHOUGH ONE SOURCE STATES THAT THERE WILL BE AN ARTICLE ON JEWS IN SOVIET SCIENCE.

9. TEXTS OF THE VERGELIS AND FISHMAN INTERVIEWS POUCHED TO EUR/SOV. MATLOCK

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